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A comparison of the nineteenth and twentieth century criticism of Shakespeare's heroines

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A COMPARISON OF THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century critics appraised Shakespeare's heroines by standards different from those of the twentieth; consequently the two ages reached different conclusions. The purpose of this paper is to point out just what these differences are.

A paper of this scope had to be narrowed in some ways. Otherwise a formidable array of heroines would have been enumerated, but little depth of research could have been shown. In the general conclusion the result would have been the same, as I have discovered through wide reading. To limit the subject, only the most famous heroines could be included. The process of assembling a bibliography on the field of criticism of Shakespeare's heroines showed that some heroines had been fully discussed, while others had been given little in the way of criticism. A great mass of material on a certain heroine, for example, would show that, since she was considered important by many writers of a certain period, she should be given consideration in this discussion. In this way the number of heroines discussed in this paper was limited to seven: Portia (in Merchant of Venice), Rosalind, Juliet, Ophelia, Desdemona, Cleopatra, and Lady Macbeth.

Another question, that of locating the division between the nineteenth and twentieth century criticism, then arose. The original plan was to divide at 1900, but the discovery of a reactionary period in the early twentieth century necessitated three, not two, divisions. The first, or Victorian, period begins with William Hazlitt, reached a high point in Mrs. Jameson and Mr. Bowdler, and continued to about 1912. The next period commences with the publication of Frank Harris' Women of Shakespeare. The standards of this second period are exactly opposite to those of the Victorian era, those heroines that were previously frowned upon rising in the critics' estimation; whereas the gentle, sweet, and long suffering heroines eulogized by the Victorians now receive severe criticism. Following that reactionary period comes another change. The heroines are no longer praised to the heavens nor subjected to extremely adverse criticism, but instead are given more dignified and accurate treatment. The Victorian standards are not hanging over the heads of the critics; nor do the critics feel they must debunk all the heroines to prove that they are as daring or worldly as the critics of the reactionary period tried to be. This is the type of criticism of the heroines that is in vogue today.

CHAPTER II

JULIET

Of all Shakespeare's heroines Juliet receives the most adoration and praise. Furthermore, probably more has been written on her than any other heroine.

The German critics, Goethe, Wilhelm Schlegel, and Friedrich Schlegel, were enraptured by this glorious creation.[1] The English critics equal the Germans' praise in every way. William Hazlitt, for example, chose Juliet to "shew the perfect refinement and delicacy of Shakespear's conception of female character."[2] Following is an example of the high-sounding praise which he applies to Juliet:

> The character is indeed one of perfect truth and sweetness. It has nothing forward, nothing coy, nothing affected or coquettish about it; - it is a pure effusion of nature. It is as frank as it is modest, for it has no thought that it wishes to conceal. It reposes in conscious innocence on the strength of its affections. Its delicacy does not consist in coldness and reserve, but in combining warmth of imagination and tenderness of heart with the most voluptuous sensibility. Love is a gentle flame that rarefies and expands her whole being.[3]

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1. Cf. "Shakespeare in Germany," Blackwood's Magazine, March, 1835.

2. William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespear's Plays, p. 110.

3. Op. cit., p. 112.

Anna Jameson, another nineteenth-century critic, felt that it was impossible to say better things than had already been said about Juliet; she could only say more. The following passage is typical:

> Such is the simplicity, the truth, and the loveliness of Juliet's character, that we are not at first aware of its complexity, its depth, and its variety.[4]

After giving Juliet superlatives, Mrs. Jameson champions her in the following passage, which bothered some nineteenth century critics. She had been

> shocked at the utter want of taste and refinement in those who, with coarse derision, or in a spirit of prudery yet more gross and perverse, have dared to comment on the beautiful "Hymn to the Night," breathed out by Juliet in the silence and solitude of her chamber.....Let it be remembered, that in this speech Juliet is not supposed to be addressing an audience, nor even a confidante.[5]

This explanation is repeated by Henry Hudson and has become a standard defense of Juliet's propriety.[6] Hudson's criticism is in essence the same as Mrs. Jameson's.

Dowden's criticism is of the same type as Hudson's and Mrs. Jameson's. Dowden waxes eloquent in his praise of Juliet, whose depiction by Shakespeare he considers one of the two great portraits of women. The other was Portia (Merchant of Venice).

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4. Mrs. Jameson, op. cit., p. 60.

5. Ibid.

6. Henry Hudson, Lectures, II, p. 50.

An illustration of his effusive language is as follows:

> If in a rich garden we found some red-hearted flower not yet unclosed, and if we had arrived just at the moment when sunlight fell upon it, and the petals suddenly burst open, and all the sweetness and bloom in an instant spread abroad, we should have before our eyes an image of Juliet's awakening to passion, and of her instantaneous transit from childhood to womanhood.[7]

The preceding passage illustrates one of the main differences between the Victorian critics and those of the present day. The former treat their subjects more emotionally. They use flowery words, and feel as if they are confidantes of the heroines; whereas the twentieth century writers see the heroines from a less personal viewpoint.

An example of a critic who felt very near to Juliet was Helena Faucit. So much did the scene in which Juliet takes poison terrify Miss Faucit that on one occasion while playing Juliet she really fainted at the end of it, "so much was I overcome with the reality of the 'thick-coming fancies.'"[8]

Like many critics before her, Miss Faucit praises Juliet for her beauty, her charm, her graciousness, her nobleness, and her gentleness. She uses the same dramatic wording, as well as the usual superlatives.[9]

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7. E. Dowden, "Shakespere's Portraiture of Women," in Transcripts and Studies, p. 539.

8. Helena Faucit, Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters, p. 146.

9. Ibid, pp. 113-117, passim.

William Winter, the noted dramatic critic, exemplifies the usual romantic conception in this summation of Juliet's character:

> Her attributes of character are nobility, which includes chastity, integrity, and fidelity, decision, courage, fortitude, inflexibility of purpose, and the capability of passionate devotion.[10]

Frank Harris, writing in 1912, shows the tendency of the twentieth century writers to be more critical. Although Juliet is still honored highly, there is somewhat less heroine worship. Harris either ignored or failed to read Mrs. Jameson's explanation of Juliet's "Hymn to the Night." He is as shocked as a Victorian and expresses his feelings vehemently: "The words sin against human nature in their sensuality and boldness. Girls hardly ever say as much as they think or feel; but this Juliet is as outspoken as a young man."[11] His conclusion is "In everything else Juliet is natural enough for the purpose of the poem."[12]

Helen Moriarty rebuked Harris and critics like him for his rude comment on Juliet. She asks,

> Shall we, because Juliet falls unconsciously into the free speech of the day, suffer a foul imagination to smirch the fair, white robe of her virgin innocence?[13]

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10. William Winter, "Romeo and Juliet," Century 87:399-410, January, 1914.

11. Frank Harris, Women of Shakespeare, p. 64.

12. Ibid.

13. Helen Moriarty, "The Women of Shakespeare," p. 452, Catholic World, July, 1922.

Her opinion is that of most of the critics who came after her. Two years later Agnes Mackenzie noted the danger of turning the "Hymn to the Night" into a sentimental farce or a wanton speech. However, "That flaming soliloquy of hers is nobly handled."[14] Mackenzie regards Juliet as "incomparably the greatest figure of Shakespeare's."[15] No adverse comments are found on any of her pages.

E. K. Chambers likewise saw that there was no reason to moralize when the "white-souled Juliet" changed by love "into a breathing, passionate, daring woman."[16]

Many of these writers find the charm of Juliet in the fact that she is such a child. Both Moriarty and Harley Granville-Barker do this. The latter says, "Her tragedy is a child's tragedy; half its poignancy would be gone otherwise. Her bold innocence is a child's."[17] Throughout his book Granville-Barker gives benevolent and sympathetic treatment to Juliet. He champions her on the one passage which has worried so many critics of the Bowdler school.

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14. Agnes Mackenzie, Women in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 60.

15. Ibid, p. 67.

16. E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey, p. 76.

17. Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, Vol. II, p. 343.

He hopes, as do the rest of us,

> that the last has been heard of such nonsense - eliminating of 'Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds'... (some of the finest verse in the play) on the ground - God save the mark! of its immodesty.[18]

Juliet has been admired by both centuries. In the nineteenth there was a tendency to overpraise. Such critics as Mrs. Jameson and Mr. Dowden best exemplify this. On the other hand, some passages did not agree with the conduct of the age, and Mr. Bowdler felt it was necessary to delete some of them so that Shakespeare could be read by the family without impropriety. As late as 1912 critics worried over "Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds." The tendency today is to be impatient with such nonsense. The generally sympathetic feeling of the nineteenth century critics toward Juliet could almost be termed possessive. They suffered with her and therefore felt a right to speak for her.

While the twentieth century still ranks her among Shakespeare's greatest heroines, if not the greatest one, it tends to be more objective in its criticism. Perhaps this is a reflection of the age, just as the extravagant language of the nineteenth century was characteristic. Nevertheless, both centuries agree in admiration. The differences consist of method and judgment in terms of respective eras.

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18. Ibid, p. 347.

CHAPTER III

PORTIA

A heroine who is among the less controversial figures is Portia. There was no moral stigma attached to her, as there was in the case of Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra. The majority of the Victorian critics admired her; only her intellectual superiority brought forth any comments against her.

William Hazlitt's comments, for instance, were cool because of her show of intelligence. He applied the words "affectation" and "pedantry" to Portia, "Which perhaps were proper qualifications for the office of 'civil doctor,' which she undertakes and executes so successfully."[1] On the famous mercy speech, Hazlitt's wry remark was, "There are a thousand finer in Shakespear."[2]

Anna Jameson, whom we would expect to stand up for Portia, worried so much about the "masculine quality of intellect" in Portia that she felt the necessity of apologizing for it to the extent of two pages. After explaining Portia's intellect to her own satisfaction, Mrs. Jameson attacked Schlegel for calling Portia "clever." Aside from this instance, Mrs. Jameson gives her usual superlatives to

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1. William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 209.

2. Ibid.

a Shakespearean heroine. These phrases included "commanding grace...highbred, airy elegance...a spirit of magnificence.. and genuine tenderness."[3]

Edward Dowden, continuing in the vein, showed that Portia in masculine attire could still be feminine. "Shakespeare is most careful to accentuate the feminine characteristics."[4] The masculine dress must have brought about some criticism, or Dowden would not have bothered to defend it. No twentieth century writer worried about Portia's dress. Dowden goes on to praise her highly. "Portia marks an epoch in Shakespeare's creations of female character.....How refined an intellect, how ardent a heart,"[5] are but a few of the highly complimentary phrases applied to Portia.

Francis Anne Kemble, an actress of the nineteenth century, exemplifies the critic who saw no faults in Portia. She wrote:

> Shakespeare's Portia, my ideal of a perfect woman, the wise, witty woman, loving with all her soul and submitting with all her heart to a man whom everybody but herself (who was the best judge) would have judged her inferior; the deep-hearted woman, full of keen perception, of active-efficiency, of wisdom prompted by love, of tenderest unselfishness, of generous magnanimity; noble, simple, humble, pure, true;

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3. Mrs. Jameson, op. cit., p. 65.

4. Dowden, op. cit., p. 553.

5. Ibid, p. 363.

> dutiful, religious, and full of fun; delightful above all others, the woman of women.[6]

Helena Faucit, Lady Martin, writing in the latter half of the nineteenth century, continued the praise of Mrs. Jameson, Edward Dowden, and Francis Kemble. She says of Portia,

> I have always looked upon Portia as a perfect piece of Nature's handiwork. Her character combines all the graces of the richest womanhood with the strength of purpose, the wise helpfulness, and sustained power of the noblest manhood. Indeed, in this instance, Shakespeare shows us that it is the woman's keener wit and insight which see into and overcome the difficulty which has perplexed the wisest heads in Venice. For, without a doubt, as it seems to me at least, it is to her cultivated and bright intelligence and not alone to the learned Dr. Bellario, her cousin, that Bassanio is indebted for the release of his friend Antonio.[7]

Miss Faucit, in an extravagant moment, invents an aftermath in which Portia acts as a ministering angel to Shylock and converts him. Miss Faucit foresees that the Jew will not live long, and in his last hour

> His looks will be upon the eyes which have opened his, and shown him the light to lighten his darkness, and he who was despised, reviled, and himself at war with all men, will now have felt the happiness of bestowing forgiveness, and the blessed hope of being himself forgiven."[8]

Just before the beginning of the twentieth century another critic undertook an explanation of Portia's masculine

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6. Francis Anne Kemble, "An Old Woman's Gossip," in Heroes and Heroines of Fiction, p. 303.

7. Helena Faucit, op. cit., p. 26.

8. Ibid, pp. 41-42.

disguise. He fully approved her assuming the dress of a man because of the dire need.[9] The article appeared in a most conservative magazine, the Catholic World.

Typical of the emotional treatment given to Shakespeare's heroines, it expostulates on her character:

> Her pure Christian character prevented her from overwhelming Shylock until she had given him every opportunity to show a merciful disposition. But when he had refused thrice, nay, ten times his principal, and continued to clamor for his pound of flesh, then she saw the terrible, cold-blooded vindictiveness of the usurer, and, like Jupiter fulminating over Greece, she let fall the thunderbolt she had long withheld.[10]

At the beginning of the twentieth century the critics no longer bothered to defend or discuss her intellect or felt that they had to explain her doublet and hose. Neither did they wax emotional about her. This does not mean that most of these writers did not think highly of her, but that they presented their views in a more reserved manner.

Frank Harris, for instance, believed that Portia was an idealized character, a brilliant and careful study, but lacked individuality. She possessed the good points of Shakespeare's Julia (Two Gentlemen from Verona) and Juliet. There is a contrast to the strong nineteenth century feeling for the heroine's individuality in this statement:

> Portia's humility and her desire to be married are merely usual maiden qualities...consequently

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9. "Shakespere and the New Woman," Catholic World, November, 1896, p. 165.

10. Ibid.

> the soul painting is not only superficial, but a little unsteady and unsatisfactory.[11]

Harris shows here that the period immediately following the beginning of the century tended to take the opposite view to the nineteenth century conception of Shakespeare's heroines; however, his comment was not so extremely opposed here as in the case of some other heroines.

Agnes Mackenzie agreed with Frank Harris' contention that Portia was somewhat typed. Her words are

> She is...a little generalised, a little made upon a formula, and though the formula is a very attractive one and she comes alive enough, she is not born of that clear passion of the imagination that turns Juliet from an element of stock romance to a lovely and fierily living human being.[12]

Contrasted to this, E. K. Chambers' appraisal of Portia was that the whole play

> stands under the domination of Portia, the first and most triumphant of Shakespeare's questing heroines; and its atmosphere is throughout in harmony with Portia's sunny hair, and Portia's sunny wit, and Portia's sunny temper.[13]

The criticism of more recent years finds little wrong with Portia, though the way the feelings are expressed differs markedly from the Victorian praise. Later critics do not feel so emotionally about Portia; they are better able to detach themselves and view her objectively.

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11. Frank Harris, op. cit., p. 77.

12. Agnes Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 81.

13. E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 107.

Virginia Taylor McCormick, writing in 1939, had a high regard for Portia as a "serious-minded character with a sweet reasonableness,"[14] but notes that Portia "Carries the steel of a sharp sword beneath her exterior."[15]

These calm and dignified words give an honest opinion of a Shakespearean heroine. The propriety of dressing as a man is not even mentioned in the article. This is typical of the twentieth century commentaries.

Harley Granville-Barker completes the comments of the writers of this century. While he admires Portia, he likewise judges her on standards different from those of the previous century. His evaluation of her, so aptly phrased, is as follows:

> To the very end she expands in her fine freedom, growing in authority and dignity, fresh touches of humor enlightening her, new traits of graciousness showing. She is a great lady in her perfect simplicity, in her ready tact...and in her quite unconscious self-sufficiency...Yet she is no more than a girl.[16]

Thomas Parrot's criticism is essentially the same as Harley Granville-Barker's. Both emphasize her gracious and happy humor and note that although she is a great lady, she is "little more than the girl she once calls herself."[17]

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14. Virginia Taylor McCormick, "Women and Love as Shakespeare Sees Them," Catholic World, Dec., 1939, p. 331.

15. Ibid.

16. Harley Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 348.

17. Thomas Parrot, Shakespearean Comedy, p. 141.

Portia was judged in the nineteenth century in terms of the way in which she suited the age. Her doublet and hose displeased some of her critics, as did her intelligence. Those who praised her felt as if they knew her and could speak for her. This characteristic is also notable in the comments on other heroines. The writers at the opening of the next century found fault with Portia for being a type, not an individual. More recently, however, she has been elevated to her rightful position. The criticism of Portia differs from that of the other heroines in that the extreme praises and diatribes are not found. A nearly middle course is followed in most cases, with only slight variations.

CHAPTER IV

ROSALIND

Rosalind, like Portia, is a heroine who does little to be criticized, so that most commentaries in both centuries have only good to say of her. Henry Hudson, in his edition of Shakespeare's Works, put very aptly the reason for Rosalind's finding little unfavorable criticism among the Victorians. He said,

> She never starts any moral or emotional reluctances in our converse with her; all our sympathies go along with her freely, because she never jars upon them or touches them against the grain. [1]

The writers who will be quoted substantiate Hudson's statement. William Hazlitt, for example, gives this commentary on Rosalind:

> Rosalind's character is made up of sportive gaiety and natural tenderness: her tongue runs the faster to conceal the pressure at her heart. She talks herself out of breath, only to get deeper in love. The coquetry with which she plays with her lover in the double character which she has to support is managed with the nicest address. How full of voluble, laughing graces is all her conversation with Orlando.[2]

When this discussion turns to Mrs. Jameson, as it must, the reader may expect some rapturous comments about another exquisite creation of Shakespeare's, and the reader is not

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1. William Shakespeare, As You Like It, edited by Henry Hudson, "Introduction," p. 19.

2. William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 235.

disappointed. The following illustration will suffice:

> To what else shall we compare her, all-enchanting as she is: - to the silvery summer clouds, which even while we gaze on them, shift their hues and forms, dissolving into air, and light, and rainbow showers? - to the May morning flush with the opening blossoms and roseate dews, and charm of the earliest birds? - to some wild and beautiful melody, such as some shepherd boy might 'pipe to Amaryllis in the shade'? - to a mountain streamlet, now smooth as a mirror in which the skies may glass themselves and anon leaping and sparkling in the sunshine - or rather to the very sunshine itself? for so her genial spirit touches into life and beauty whatever it shines on[3]

Mrs. Jameson does feel the necessity of telling us that Rosalind can wear her masculine clothes "without the slightest impugnment of her delicacy."[4]

Fletcher, writing ten years after Mrs. Jameson, had nothing but highest praise for Rosalind's intelligence, tenderness, grace, and self possession. According to him, she and Imogen were "two of the noblest and most exquisitely compounded among the ideal women of Shakespeare."[5]

Richard Grant White, writing at the turn of the century, comes to substantially the same conclusions as Mr. Fletcher, Mrs. Jameson, and Mr. Hazlitt. His evaluation of Rosalind follows:

> Rosalind has vivacity and wit enough to captivate those who like a woman of spirit; and yet with

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3. Anna Jameson, op. cit., p. 52.

4. Ibid, p. 54.

5. Fletcher, Studies of Shakespeare, p. 237.

> this there is interwoven so much womanly tenderness and delicacy, she is, in her gayest moods, so truly, sometimes so touchingly, feminine, that she wins more admirers than she dazzles.[6]

Much the same idea is conveyed by Dowden. Each of these critics has the same thought of Rosalind, but each expresses it in a slightly different way. Dowden's point is that

> Rosalind's brilliance is never hard or cold. A cascade of sparkling speech sallies from her lips; it is sun-illumined as it falls, and over it hangs the iris of a lover's hope.[7]

> In the forest of Arden and in her martial dress, Rosalind is, if possible, more exquisitely a woman than when she threw the chain around Orlando's neck.[8]

The Victorians are concerned with emphasizing Rosalind's femininity, yet research disclosed no passages criticizing her for wearing male attire. In Portia's case there were a few defenses for her masculine dress. Many of the defenses seem to be built against non-existent opponents or, perhaps, the conventions of the age.

Helena Faucit, who wrote in the latter half of the nineteenth century, keeps up the same admiration for Rosalind that had been going on from the beginning of the century. She picks out her good points and gives a detailed account of

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6. Richard Grant White, "Rosalind" in Heroes and Heroines of Fiction, p. 322.

7. E. Dowden, op. cit., p. 354.

8. Ibid.

them. Of Rosalind's personality she says,

> All the playfulness, the wit, the sarcasm bubble up, sparkle after sparkle, with bewildering rapidity. Can we wonder they should work a charm upon Orlando?[9]

Her conclusion is:

> In the days that are before her, all the largeness of heart, the rich imagination, the bright commanding intellect, which made her the presiding genius of the forest of Arden, will work with no less beneficent sway in the wider sphere of princely duty.[10]

This chapter would not be complete without a comment from that conservative magazine, the Catholic World. Rosalind had not offended any of the standards of decency, so she received the most favorable comment. This magazine is the one which hurled the anathema at Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. Agreeing with Hudson's statement given at the beginning of this chapter, this article says of Rosalind:

> In our opinion she is the most delightfully witty person on Shakespere's stage. Every word and motion seem to sparkle with life. So exquisitely delicate is her wooing of Orlando that it is impossible to find the least cause for reproof. And how modest she is! Witness the artless delicacy with which she fears to let Orlando see her arrayed in doublet and hose; one of the most perfect touches of refined woman is to love, admire, and emulate her. We present her spotless character without commentary. Comparisons are odious.[11]

That concludes the criticism of the nineteenth century.

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9. Helena Faucit, op. cit., 264.

10. Ibid, p. 285.

11. "Shakespere and the New Women," p. 164.

Frank Harris, an example of the slight opposing force which sprang up shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century, called Rosalind an improbable character on the grounds that she had no faults. To Harris, Rosalind was just another Portia with archness added to her love and tenderness; "but the too great sweet is inclined to cloy."[12] The only thing that made Rosalind live for Harris is her scolding speech to Phebe, and then only because it pointed out his pet theory of the Fitton-Shakespeare relationship. Fortunately this biased opinion did not remain for many years. The only other writer to suggest that Rosalind was not an individual was Agnes Mackenzie.[13] In addition she gave some admiring criticism. Such phrases as "intensely alive...adorable...gay humor...clearsighted wit...generous and whole-hearted lover"[14] are applied to Rosalind, which would tend to show that the criticism had turned again to favor Rosalind.

Charles H. Herford, in 1920, believed Rosalind totally responsible for the vivacity of As You Like It. Hers was a "refined, yet delightful" contribution.[15]

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12. Frank Harris, op. cit., p. 78.

13. Agnes Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 112.

14. Ibid.

15. Charles H. Herford, "The Normality of Shakespeare," English Association Pamphlet No. 47, Sept. 1920.

Later in the century Virginia Taylor McCormick reiterated Mrs. Jameson's ecstatic comparison of Rosalind "to the flush of a May morning or the freshness of a mountain streamlet,"[16] and continues her praise:

> Her wit and gaiety have not the sting of Beatrice's. Hers is a gentle gaiety, rising from a sportive nature, and Rosalind in doublet and hose is alluring, at once a lovely woman and a charming lad.[17]

There is nothing original here. She writes what had been written about Rosalind for a full century. Certain repetitions of previous criticisms occur in the commentaries on the heroines.

E. K. Chambers applied such complimentary terms as "witty and brave, audacious and tender," and "joyous vitality" to Rosalind.[18] In addition, Chambers was convinced that Rosalind gave the play its human charm and saved it from mediocrity.[19]

Mark Van Doren, a twentieth century critic who has a genuine liking for Rosalind, was moved by her sparkling wit and gallantry. Paying a compliment to Rosalind, he says, "She, not Jaques, is the philosopher of the play."[20]

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16. Cf. footnote 3, p. 17 above.
17. Virginia Taylor McCormick, op. cit., p. 333.
18. E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 156.
19. Ibid, pp. 155-163, passim.
20. Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, p. 159.

Thomas Parrot calls Rosalind "a creature of a natural and almost divine simplicity."[21] He, like Mark Van Doren, enthusiastically praises her for her light-hearted gaiety and wit.

There is not a great contrast here between the two centuries of criticism. The only real break appears at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mark Van Doren can hardly be called Victorian, although his conclusions are the same as those given in the nineteenth century. The difference is apparent when the language of a writer like Mrs. Jameson or Dowden is compared to Mr. Van Doren's. The language of the former is highly embellished with figurative language, while the latter's is plainer and more to the point. The twentieth century critics do not give such lengthy comments on the heroines. Mrs. Jameson's two page question on what she could compare Rosalind to would never be found in today's criticisms. The difference, then, is one of method of presentation, not conclusion.

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21. Thomas Parrot, Shakespearean Comedy, p. 171.

CHAPTER V

OPHELIA

> Ophelia-poor Ophelia! Oh, far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the briers of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life! What shall be said of her? for eloquence is mute before her! Like a strain of sad, sweet music, which comes floating by us on the wings of night and silence, and which we rather feel than hear - like the exhalation of the violet, dying even upon the sense it charms - like a snowflake, dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth-like the light surf severed from the billow, which a breath disperses; such is the character of Ophelia.[1]

Thus spoke Anna Jameson. Placing Ophelia on a pedestal, Mrs. Jameson defied anyone who dared consider Ophelia's character too deeply, for it was so sanctified in her own mind that she felt sure that a "touch would profane it."[2] Considering her as a delicate, innocent creature, yet making sure that everyone knows she does not consider Ophelia weak, Mrs. Jameson continues:

> The love of Ophelia, which she never once confesses, is like a secret we have stolen from her, and which ought to die upon our hearts as upon her own. Her sorrow asks not words, but tears.[3]

William Hazlitt seems to echo this conception by calling Ophelia "a character almost too exquisitely touching to

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1. Anna Jameson, op. cit., p. 111.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

be dwelt upon,"[4] and continues with the lament,

> Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos.[5]

Mary Cowden Clarke, another imaginative Victorian, invented, with the aid of the internal evidence in Shakespeare's plays, the girlhood of Ophelia to the opening of Hamlet. She wrote in much the same vein as did Charles Lamb in his Tales From Shakespeare. They both had wide-eyed adoration for Shakespeare and his heroines and set down their thoughts in equally bad prose.

Hudson, in 1882, continued the praise and pity of Ophelia, declaring, "Indeed I love the dear girl much as most of those about her do."[6] This illustrates another trait of this period, that of feeling very personally about the heroines. Many of the writers felt that they knew the heroines well enough to speak for them. Further praise for Ophelia is found in the revelation that she is "the only pure, sweet, honourable form of humanity about the court,"[7] and the following:

> Ophelia is an intelligent girl, decidedly so, though not at all intellectual or strong-minded: Whenever she speaks, she does it with

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4. William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 85.

5. Ibid.

6. Henry Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, p. 307.

7. Ibid.

> exquisite grace and propriety...She has good sense...She both thinks feelingly and feels thoughtfully. [8]

Lady Martin (Helena Faucit), writing in the latter half of the nineteenth century, gives further sympathetic treatment to Ophelia. Again an echo of Mrs. Jameson is heard in the lines,

> Who can wonder that a character so delicately outlined, and shaded in with strokes so fine, should be often misunderstood? [9]

Such lines as these imply that adverse criticism may have been uttered against the untouchable Ophelia; yet each criticism seems to have been silenced and outnumbered by her many staunch defenders.

The ballads sung by Ophelia, which "never ought to issue from a young and cultured woman's lips,"[10] were explained rather apologetically by both Lady Martin and Mary Cowden Clarke as the result of her country upbringing. The latter includes a passage showing Ophelia's coarse nursemaid singing those eyebrow-raising tunes. After absolving Ophelia of all blame, Lady Martin immediately launches an attack on Hamlet. She neither trusts him nor believes his love. This attitude is the result of weighing his actions against his words.[11]

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8. Ibid, p. 308.
9. Helena Faucit, op. cit., p. 3.
10. Ibid, p. 8.
11. Ibid.

As a stern protecting chaperone to Ophelia, Lady Martin would have made short work of Hamlet's petitions.

Andrew C. Bradley brings the period of excessive pity and praise of Ophelia to a close. With most of the writers who cast their lots with Ophelia, Mr. Bradley agreed with Mrs. Jameson that "the analysis of her character seems almost a desecration."[12] Mr. Bradley further defended Ophelia against critics who found her weak for going mad; he points out that the three persons closest to her either are dead or have departed and that Ophelia feels responsible for Hamlet's madness. Mr. Bradley concludes, "In her madness Ophelia continues sweet and lovable."[13]

The great revolt was led by Frank Harris. What a contrast is his opinion to that of Lady Martin. Harris believes Hamlet well rid of Ophelia, which contrasts greatly with Lady Martin's belief that Hamlet had better be deserving of of Ophelia's love. Harris' words are, "Hamlet's love to Ophelia is scarcely strong enough to deserve the name, but his jealousy is a raging, burning fever."[14]

Harris carries this further by calling Hamlet's love for Ophelia "merely incidental."[15] His dominant passions

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12. Andrew Cecil Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 160.
13. Ibid, p. 112.
14. Frank Harris, op. cit., p. 157.
15. Ibid, p. 151.

are "jealousy of his mother and a desire for revenge on her seducer."[16] This, of course, is supposed to tie in with the Fitton-Shakespeare incident.

Expressing an attitude soon to be typical of most of the later critics, Mr. Harris sees in Ophelia "no redeeming vices or weaknesses." He said, "Ophelia can only weep and go crazy when Hamlet insults her.....(She is a) mere abstraction of patience.....Hardly a taint of earthly temper or tincture of warm humanity in her."[17]

Agnes Mackenzie used the reasoning of Mr. Harris. Following is the essence of her opinion of Ophelia:

> She is pretty and sweet and gentle, and she ruins herself, so all the critics have forgiven her and said nice things about her, except a few young ones this side of the Great War. But I am not at all sure that Shakespeare forgave her altogether, though I think the mad scenes were given to her as her expiation. Even there, however, she is never sentimentalised, though the prudery of managers has regularly cut the song that spoils her prettiness.[18]

Crowning these bitter lines is the following equally trenchant statement, which leaves no doubt that Ophelia is going through a period of scornful criticism:

> Simply she (Gertrude) is stupid, coarse, and shallow. And Ophelia is not unlike her; she is not coarse, only obvious, but that is the main difference. So between them, with the very best intentions, they sow ruin all about them, and

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16. Ibid.

17. Ibid, p. 149.

18. Agnes Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 200.

> most of all among the men they love. And they never for a moment know that they have done it.[19]

Although not written with such bitterness as the preceding examples, Charles Herford's conviction is that Ophelia's love is responsible for Hamlet's downfall...."Her love bears within it the seed of tragedy both for Hamlet and herself."[20] Aside from this Herford does express sympathy for Ophelia's plight.

E. K. Chambers also expressed the attitude that Ophelia was inadequate. He said:

> Ophelia, a timid conventional girl, was too fragile a reed for a man to lean upon.[21]

Furthermore Mr. Chambers was among those whom John Corbin in 1940 criticized for saying that Ophelia was a liar because of the episode behind the arras.[22]

When, in 1940, the pendulum starts to swing in the opposite direction, John Corbin comes to Ophelia's rescue. He indignantly refutes the scandalous charges that had been urged against her. Disagreeing with Dowden's declaration to the effect that "she was a little liar,"[23] Corbin continues

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19. Ibid, p. 225.

20. Charles H. Herford, "The Normality of Shakespeare," p. 12-13.

21. E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 187.

22. Ibid.

23. John Corbin, "Ophelia Against Her Critics," p. 11.

to break down the arguments of Elmer Stoll that she told an untruth when answering "At home," to the question, "Where's your father?" Corbin finds the answer "at worst the whitest of lies - and the literal truth if one insists on those localities."[24] That is, Polonius was in the castle, which was his home.

Harley Granville-Barker takes up the controversy and clinches the argument for Ophelia by asking,

> Of what is Ophelia guilty? At worst, of a single lie told to a madman for his good. We may call her docility a fault, when, as she is bid, she shuts herself away from Hamlet; but how not trust to her brother's care for her and her father's wisdom?[25]

Later Harley Granville-Barker gives great sympathy to Ophelia in the scenes of Hamlet's denunciation of her and in the play scene when Hamlet launches smutty jokes at her. This critic commends her bravery to try to joke with Hamlet after her "gentle, fragile nature"[26] has sustained such wrenching, and concludes, "Her madness tragically outmatches his whose work it is."[27]

Thomas Parrott's opinion again agrees with Harley Granville Barker's. He doesn't try to place blame on Ophelia just because Hamlet is so great. In fact, he is one of the

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24. Ibid, p. 12.

25. Harley Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 212.

26. Ibid, p. 216.

27. Ibid.

few writers who face the fact that Hamlet has driven Ophelia to madness and death.[28]

Another critic, writing in a recent magazine, seems almost a resurrection of Mrs. Jameson. Ophelia is described as, "too sweet, too soft, too gentle, ... a lyric poem ecstatic and fragile, ... more a beautiful thought than a woman."[29]

The psycho-analytical method did not by-pass Shakespeare's heroines. An example of the less rabid type is to be found in H. Goddard's suggestion, "In Ophelia's Closet." This scholar sees signs of madness much earlier in the play than are found in the usual conception and expands his article on this assumption.[30] This psychological delving is mentioned because it was done by a scholar and is of sufficient merit for exemplification of a trend.

The latest piece of evidence to show that more sympathetic treatment is being given to Ophelia is Laurence Olivier's recent production of Hamlet. Here the wholehearted sympathy of the audience is gained for the Rose of

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28. Thomas Parrott, op. cit., p. 279.

29. Virginia Taylor McCormick, op. cit., p. 332.

30. H. Goddard, "In Ophelia's Closet," Yale Review, ns 35 no 3:462-74, March, 1946.

May, at the loss of that for Hamlet, thinks Arthur Hopkins, critic, who says:

> It is the tragedy of Hamlet that is lost throughout the picture. Instead, it becomes the tragedy of Ophelia, because she is permitted to follow more nearly the author's intent.[31]

This concludes the last period in which opinions can be grouped. The first period, from Mrs. Jameson to Dr. Bradley, could see little or no wrong in the actions of the gentle Ophelia. This would seem to reflect the ideals of the time. A romantic martyr was just what the Victorians relished, and they probably read a little too much of this into Ophelia's character. After this kid glove treatment poor Ophelia was plunged into icy waters. Critics found they had little patience with a Rose of May. She was untruthful, shallow, or treacherous. This reactionary period lasted but a short time, and again fortune smiled upon Ophelia with such protectors as John Corbin and Harley Granville-Barker. A saner treatment is given in this last era. Such things as Ophelia's humor or her diplomacy are in the critics' minds instead of the superficial qualities treated by either the Victorian or the reactionary writers.

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31. Arthur Hopkins, "Hamlet and Olivier," Theatre Arts, 32:30, August, 1948.

CHAPTER VI

DESDEMONA

The gentle Desdemona has gone through the trials that another heroine of her kind, Ophelia, was forced to contend with. Just as the disturbance about Ophelia grew out of her association with Hamlet, Desdemona was criticized in terms of her Othello. The main point of contention was the marriage of a Venetian lady to a coal-black moor. The defenses for Desdemona range from disagreeing that Othello was black at all to saying what a beautiful, democratic relationship it was. Aside from the question of Othello's color, the only other point which caused any blame to Desdemona was her equivocation concerning the handkerchief.

Early in the nineteenth century William Hazlitt paid what he thought was a high tribute to Desdemona. His conception of her was that she had no will of her own, which was exactly what a prim Victorian housewife should have been. He states,

> Her resignation and angelic sweetness of temper do not desert her at the last. The scenes in which she laments and tries to account for Othello's estrangement from her are exquisitely beautiful.[1]

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1. William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 40.

A. W. Schlegel, the German critic, makes his comment almost Jamesonian in nature:

> Desdemona is an offering without blemish... Full of simplicity, softness, and humility, and so innocent she can hardly form to herself an idea of the possibility of infidelity, she seems calculated to make the most yielding and tender wife... The only error she ever committed was marrying without the consent of her father.[2]

Thomas Campbell gives the same impression as William Hazlitt. Mr. Campbell answers a query arising from these criticisms: what would the critics think if Desdemona had retaliated?

> The terrors of the storm are also made striking to our imagination by the gentleness of the victim on which they fall, - Desdemona. Had one symptom of an angry spirit appeared in that lovely martyr, our sympathy with her would have been endangered; but Shakespeare knew better.[3]

Mrs. Jameson tells us what would happen if Desdemona displayed any intellectuality.

> In Desdemona...the slightest manifestation of intellectual power or active will would have injured the dramatic effect. She is a victim consecrated from the first, - 'an offering without blemish,' alone worthy of the grand final sacrifice; all harmony, all grace, all purity, all tenderness, all truth; But alas! to see her fluttering like a cherub in the talons of a fiend! - to see her - O poor Desdemona![4]

Mrs. Jameson displays, in addition, a characteristic found in many criticisms of the heroines, that of feeling

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2. A. W. Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, Vol. II, p. 189.

3. Thomas Campbell, Remarks on the Life and Writings of Shakespeare, p. 23.

4. Anna Jameson, op. cit., p. 157.

that she has been admitted to the inner circle of confidence. In the passage which follows an attempt is made to explain Desdemona's attraction to Othello:

> Notwithstanding this disparity of age, character, country, complexion, we, who are admitted into the secret, see her love rise naturally and necessarily out of the leading propensities of her nature.[5]

Now that the favorable comments have been presented, some thought should be directed to the unfavorable. The strongest writing against Desdemona came from John Quincy Adams. He frowned upon Desdemona as almost as deep a villain as Iago. Mr. Adams was not one of those writers who could not bear to see the virtue and delicacy of Shakespeare's Desdemona called into question. He concludes

> First. That the passion of Desdemona for Othello is unnatural, solely and exclusively because of his color. Second. That her elopement to him, and secret marriage with him, indicate a personal character not only very deficient in delicacy, but totally regardless of filial duty, of female modesty and of ingenuous shame. Third. That her deficiency in delicacy is discernible in her conduct and discourse throughout the play.[6]

Henry Hudson, gallant defender of Shakespeare's women, quickly defended Desdemona's virtue against John Q. Adams' attack.

> The truth is, what I inwardly know and feel respecting Desdemona, cannot, must not, shall

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5. Ibid, p. 150.

6. John Quincy Adams, "The Character of Desdemona," American Monthly, Vol. I:216.

> not be uttered here, lest I should harden your heart, by turning 'the awful modesties of sorrow' into merchandise. It seems a thing which she has imparted to me in confidence; a secret between us which shall not be wrung from me; which I scarce dare utter even to myself; which it were a betrayal of a most sacred trust to divulge; which you have a right to learn from none but herself; which none but herself has a right to impart.[7]

Note again that feeling of having been admitted to the select group of confidantes.

Richard Grant White did not consider Othello a negro; consequently there was no racial problem for him. He gives a favorable report of her character and finds no wrong in Desdemona's falling in love with Othello.[8] Henry Reed in his Lectures gives the same main conclusions as Richard Grant White.[9]

Adams was not the only one to frown on Desdemona. Evidence that disapproval existed much later is found in the writings of D. J. Snider. Concerning the decision of the state to favor the marriage, Mr. Snider says, "The guilt of Desdemona is here indicated."[10]

After discussing the marriage and beginning conflicts, Mr. Snider states, "Between such characters no secure,

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7. H. N. Hudson, Lectures on Shakespeare, Vol. II, pp. 346-7.

8. Richard Grant White, Shakespeare's Scholar, p. 54.

9. Henry Reed, Lectures on British Poets, p. 160.

10. D. J. Snider, System of Shakespeare's Dramas, Vol. II, p. 97.

permanent ethical union is possible. Jealousy must arise."[11] He disapproves, in general, of both Desdemona and Othello.

The opposing forces again stood up for Desdemona in the writings of Edward Rose. His conclusion contradicts those who disapprove of her. He says, "Desdemona is the most lovable, I think, of Shakespeare's women."[12]

Helena Faucit continues the praise of Desdemona and gives the same conclusions as Hazlitt, Campbell, and Jameson. Such words as the following are enough to illustrate the point.

> A being so bright, so pure, so unselfish, generous, courageous - so devoted in her love, so unconquerable in her allegiance to her 'kind lord,' even while dying by his hand; and all this beauty of body and mind blasted by the machinations of a soulless villain, who 'out of her own goodness' made the net that enmeshed her too credulous husband and her absolutely guileless self![13]

Miss Faucit gives this simple explanation of the attraction of Desdemona to Othello:

> The accident of the difference in Othello's complexion, which operates against him in other eyes, endears him to hers. It touches her generousity.[14]

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11. Ibid.

12. Edward Rose, "Sudden Emotion: Its Effect upon Different Characters as Shown by Shakspere" in New Shakespeare Society, Transactions, 1880-1882, p. 1.

13. Helena Faucit, op. cit., p. 47.

14. Ibid, p. 59.

The latter part of the century brought forth substantially the same picture of the sweet door-mat type of Desdemona.

When Bradley put forth his criticism, he believed in facing the issue of Othello's color and not making excuses for Desdemona. He pointed out that we fail "to realize how extraordinary it was in a gentle Venetian girl to love Othello, and to assail fortune with such a 'downright violence and storm' as is expected only of a hero."[15]

The critics who tried to lessen the distance between Desdemona and Othello were only blurring the glorious conception, according to Mr. Bradley.

In 1911 Mrs. Hinton Stewart disagreed with the accusations that Desdemona was weak or tactless, wanted moral force, or was incapable either of resisting or resenting; she called Desdemona's gentle characteristics positive, not negative virtues. Reflecting the tendency of the age to think of the equality of women, Mrs. Stewart refuted claims that Desdemona was childlike and instead saw her as an "Intense, sensitive, consciously pure-minded woman, petrified by an outrageous accusation."[16]

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15. Andrew C. Bradley, op. cit., p. 202.

16. Mrs. Hinton Stewart, "Character of Desdemona," p. 544.

When Mr. Harris' statements are examined, the reader can expect a change from the writings of the previous century. Mr. Harris does disagree with the majority of the former critics, except D. J. Snider and John Q. Adams, although Mr. Harris' writings are not quite so vengeful. He sees nothing inevitable about Othello's jealousy. The writers up to this time usually emphasized the possibility that jealousy might not have arisen, but Mr. Harris finds it unavoidable. His explanation is:

> It is reason-founded on difference of colour, education, and surroundings, and is whipped to madness by vile and envious suggestion.[17]

Agnes Mackenzie blames Desdemona for the tragedy, although she does admire her for her attempt to shield Othello in the final scene. Miss Mackenzie does not seem to consider that Othello failed Desdemona because he did not take her into his fullest confidence; the critic merely blames Desdemona for failing Othello.[18] Both Mackenzie and Harris treat Desdemona in a harsher way than most of the writers of the previous century.

E. K. Chambers discusses Desdemona's character without trying to place the blame on either Desdemona or Othello. ... "Failure is presented as a resultant no longer of character but of destiny."[19] Desdemona is a "tender woman,"

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17. Frank Harris, op. cit., p. 13.

18. Agnes Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 245.

19. E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 220.

and an "easy victim" of circumstances.[20] This offers a great contrast to the opinions of the previous writers, Harris and Mackenzie.

The writers of the last decade agree that Desdemona's position is a high one. Rosamond Gilder writes:

> Desdemona is much more than fair and frail. She has courage, audacity, resourcefulness and a capacity for love transcending Juliet's own.[21]

Alfred Harbage, in his recent book As They Liked It, shows the same high esteem of Desdemona. He writes

> The role of Desdemona is one of the most remarkable in Shakespeare. No woman in the plays is more pure than she, none whose every word is so compounded of kindliness, purity, and faith.[22]

The last twentieth century critic to be considered, Harley Granville-Barker, could find only one fault in Desdemona, and that a small one. It was that she had let her father stay too long self-deceived as to her real nature. She should have let him know that she had a mind of her own. Otherwise Mr. Granville-Barker gives her a totally favorable commentary.[23]

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20. Ibid, p. 219.

21. Rosamond Gilder, "Othello and Venus," Theatre Arts, Vol. XXVII:699-703, December, 1943.

22. Alfred Harbage, As They Liked It, p. 64.

23. Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, Vol. II, p. 123.

The critics of the previous century, from Mrs. Jameson to Mr. Bradley, usually picture Desdemona as a submissive girl with no will of her own. They would not have approved of her had she possessed any intellectuality. A few, such as J. Q. Adams and D. J. Snider, condemned her outright for marrying a Moor. With the beginning of the new century Desdemona met more adverse criticism, but she was assuming some individuality and backbone. Later critics review her without reference as to how she would fit into their own era, but as to how she fits into the play itself.

CHAPTER VII

LADY MACBETH

At the beginning of the nineteenth century William Richardson struck the keynote for most of the later critics to follow. Overawed by Lady Macbeth's "contrivances of the blackest crimes,"[1] he calls her "a character invariably savage,"[2] and sees absolutely no redeeming features about her. Richardson implies that Lady Macbeth might just as well have committed the murders, as she is the root of the evil deeds.

William Hazlitt continues this type of comment by calling her a "great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate."[3] He, like Richardson, is overawed by her commanding presence of mind and her extraordinary determination.

The first critic who makes any attempt to explain or sympathize with Lady Macbeth is the defender of all Shakespeare's heroines, Mrs. Jameson. She felt that Hazlitt did not tell the whole truth about Lady Macbeth. He had left some points untouched; his criticism was "a little

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1. William Richardson, A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters, p. 65.

2. Ibid.

3. William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 14.

superficial, and a little too harsh."[4] She also attacks those who think of Lady Macbeth as "nothing but a fierce, cruel woman, brandishing a couple of daggers, and inciting her husband to butcher a poor old king."[5] Mrs. Jameson then extolls Lady Macbeth's wifely virtues and points out that after all, the deeds were done for the sake of her husband. Nevertheless, Lady Macbeth receives chastisement at the hands of Mrs. Jameson. She described her as "Cruel, treacherous, and daring,"[6] as well as "a terrible impersonation of evil passions and mighty powers."[7] Furthermore, "she is doubly, trebly, dyed in guilt and blood; for the murder she instigates is rendered more frighful by disloyalty and ingratitude and by the violation of all the most sacred claims of kindred and hospitality."[8] The important characteristic to note in Mrs. Jameson's criticism is that Lady Macbeth is considered human and even feminine, not invariably savage, as most critics described her.

Samuel Colerige, who wrote very early in the nineteenth century, blamed Lady Macbeth almost totally for the guilt of her husband. His description of her is as follows:

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4. Mrs. Jameson, op. cit., p. 291.
5. Ibid, pp. 288-289.
6. Ibid, p. 291.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

> She evinces no womanly life, no wifely joy at the return of her husband, no pleased terror at the thought of past dangers.[9]

This criticism differs mainly from Mrs. Jameson's idea that Lady Macbeth possesses some feminine, wifely qualities.

Then Thomas Campbell, the poet, disagreed with both the calling of Lady Macbeth a virago and Mrs. Jameson's attempt to clear her character. Campbell calls her "A character of brilliant understanding, lofty determination and negative decency."[10]

Henry Hudson is one critic of his era who thinks out the character in terms of the play, not on the basis of former criticism or pressure of the age. He sees through Lady Macbeth's bluff and points out the many cases in which she has to fight with herself to be brave and have no conscience. While she is "indeed a great bad woman whom we fear and pity, (she is) neither so great nor so bad as is commonly supposed."[11]

After this bright spot in Victorian criticism, we return to the usual opinions with Fanny Kemble's statement:

> Lady Macbeth would make those witches and Hecate shrink away appalled from the presence of

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9. Samuel Coleridge, Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare, p. 246.

10. Thomas Campbell, Life of Mrs. Siddons, p. 7.

11. Henry Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, p. 342.

> of those 'murdering ministers' who wait on nature's mischief.[12]

Helena Faucit, though later than Kemble, voiced her opinion in somewhat the same manner. Miss Faucit has a greater understanding than Fanny Kemble and, like Mrs. Jameson, attempts to explain Lady Macbeth's actions. Miss Faucit has a great admiration of the "Stern grandeur" of Lady Macbeth's "indomitable will."[13] Perhaps Miss Faucit attempts to explain too much by attributing Lady Macbeth's wickedness to the wickedness of the age. After she thinks she has surmounted that obstacle, Miss Faucit feels free to admire the courageous and self-sustained nature of Lady Macbeth and her loyalty to her husband.

Just before the close of the century the Catholic World, epitome of convention, voiced its sentiment. You would think that its attitude would be that of all Victorians if you had not read enough to prove that it is extreme. This article was written in view of the shocking woman suffrage movement. It asks:

> What shall we say of that other beautiful type of masculine femininity, ambitious Lady Macbeth? Surely every gentle reader shrinks with repugnance from the contemplation of such an anomaly in nature.[14]

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12. Fanny Kemble, "Lady Macbeth," p. 28.

13. Helena Faucit, op. cit., p. 234.

14. "Shakespere and the New Woman," p. 162.

After this tirade was bound to come some opposing view. It was to be found in the writings of A. Symons, one Victorian who neither praises nor condemns Lady Macbeth. To him she is a woman who can be "magnificent in sin,"[15] but who has "none of the callousness which makes the comfort of the criminal."[16]

At the beginning of the twentieth century Andrew C. Bradley, the great Shakespearean critic, voices agreement with Mrs. Jameson, Mr. Hudson, and Miss Faucit in their contention that Lady Macbeth is a perfect wife. He gives the same substantiation. Further agreeing with former critics, Dr. Bradley finds her an awesome creature, but he makes his contribution to new ideas by disagreeing with the conventional idea that Macbeth is a half-hearted cowardly criminal and Lady Macbeth a whole-hearted fiend. He considers them inseparable in their crimes. He adds, "However appalling she may be, she is sublime."[17]

At this point, the beginning of the twentieth century, occurs a gradual changing of opinion toward Lady Macbeth. No longer are the critics overawed by her character or actions. The writers of this period have begun to evaluate with less emotion. Frank Harris employs his pet theory that

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15. A. Symons, Studies in Two Literatures, p. 24.

16. Ibid.

17. Andrew C. Bradley, op. cit., p. 368.

Mary Fitton served as model for Lady Macbeth's masculine traits, her resolution, and her strength.[18] There is no emotionalism displayed here, no fear of this horrible creation, no attack on her crimes, as we have been accustomed to expect in the Victorians. He remarks casually that she is "not one of Shakespeare's happier creations."[19]

Aside from the following lapse to Victorianism in a conservative magazine, the criticism continues on Harris' plane. Albert B. Purdie delivered this emotional diatribe on Lady Macbeth in 1919:

> She not only unsexes but dehumanizes herself, and this monster is to precipitate the ruin of a falling man.[20]

A return to the more common twentieth century criticism is expressed by Agnes Mackenzie. She disagrees with the former conception of a "Stalwart virago, or a prison wardress out of uniform."[21]

Again note the lack of wonder in this twentieth century critic. Of Lady Macbeth she says:

> She is very feminine, very plucky, and rather stupid, and her attitude to her husband is very precisely that of the ideal wife of the Victorians. She can see nobody in the world but him: wherefore she damns him, as many another woman has done, though less spectacularly.[22]

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18. Frank Harris, op. cit., p. 163.

19. Ibid.

20. Albert B. Purdie, "Macbeth; A Study in Sin," p. 188.

21. Agnes Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 315.

22. Ibid, p. 316.

Disagreeing with the traditional stage view of Lady Macbeth as a "sheer human monster, and the evil genius of her husband's soul,"[23] E. K. Chambers says:

> Hers (Lady Macbeth's) is both a subtler and a nobler nature than his.[24]

Twenty years after the Catholic World called Lady Macbeth a "monster," Virginia Taylor McCormick maintained in the same magazine that "Shakespeare could not help preferring Lady Macbeth to Macbeth."[25]

Further opposing earlier conceptions, McCormick continues, "No matter how she nerves herself to masculine deeds she remains feminine."[26] Words such as "brave, tender, and comforting"[27] are used to describe Lady Macbeth. Such a reversal! Mrs. McCormick makes clear to her reader that there is no suggestion that Lady Macbeth had an actual part in the crime.

Dorothy Johnson finds Lady Macbeth a "sturdy little pillar of respectability."[28]..."Like many small-brained women, she has tact and discretion."[29] The perfect wife

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23. E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey, p. 235.

24. Ibid.

25. Virginia Taylor McCormick, op. cit., p. 330.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Dorothy Johnson, "The Perfect Wife," London Mercury, Vol. XI, p. 48.

idea expressed here is somewhat the same type of criticism done by Agnes Mackenzie.

Louise C. Turner voices the trend toward recognizing that "erudite nonesense" called "Elizabethan psychology."[30]

> If the plotting villain who sees his intended victim approaching so much as cries, "Dive, thoughts, down to my soul!" his words are found heavy with psychological import he little dreamed of: he is using "words which represent the final perversion of will. In the light of Elizabethan thinking, they probably mean the wilful subjection of intellect to a mode of thought and action guided by the desires of the heart."[31]

In addition to the psychological probing discussed above, criminal analyzation has been added to the new methods of criticism. Judge August Goll's discussion of Lady Macbeth in "Criminal Types in Shakespeare," repeats the idea that Lady Macbeth did not kill for herself but for her husband.[32] She died, not for repentence, according to Judge Goll, but "for fear for the safety of her husband."[33] He concludes, "Her fate is "the lot of the typical woman criminal."[34]

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30. Louise C. Turner, "A Caveat for Critics," PMLA 61:651.

31. Ibid. Cf. Ruth L. Anderson, "Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays," University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, First Series, III, No. 4 (1927), 147.

32. August Goll, "Criminal Types in Shakespeare," Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 29:661, Jan., 1939.

33. Ibid, p. 666.

34. Ibid, p. 667.

The last critic of the twentieth century group to be discussed, Elmer Edgar Stoll, considered Lady Macbeth a "delicate and refined, not brutish"[35] person who has forced herself to do "violence to her nature."[36] To substantiate his statement, he says, "She has to take wine to brace herself up, shrinks from murder by her own hand because Duncan resembles her father, faints after it is over, walks in her sleep, and dies before her time."[37]

This is a great change from the idea of Lady Macbeth as half supernatural, which was characteristic of the last century. The criticism has come from denunciation in the nineteenth to actual praise in the twentieth.

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35. Elmer Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, p. 107.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid, p. 108.

CHAPTER VIII

CLEOPATRA

In a study of Cleopatra it might be well to point out that Shakespeare's Cleopatra is not the same as the older versions of her. Plutarch, although he felt she was Antony's evil genius, was captured by the romantic idea of the Egyptian Circe. Dion Cassius, writing a century later, gave a very different picture of a scheming, betraying drab. Dion Cassius' Cleopatra spends her last efforts on a speech designed to awaken a sensual interest in Octavius; the last words of Plutarch's Cleopatra are a lamentation for Antony. Shakespeare changed Plutarch's Cleopatra somewhat. He emphasized her loyalty in love and ennobled her generally.[1] Just as there are opposing plays, there are contradictory opinions in critical appreciation of Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

The Victorian writers cannot help admiring her, yet they do so somewhat apologetically. Mrs. Jameson is slightly confused but must be given credit for recognizing the worth of Cleopatra. She has the feeling, which is repeated by later writers, that Cleopatra's greatness is not consistent.[2]

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1. William Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, edited by Harold Newcomb Hillebrand, p. xxxii.

2. "Cleopatra could be great by fits and starts, but never sustained her dignity upon so high a tone for ten minutes together," Anna Jameson, op. cit., p. 194.

Nevertheless Mrs. Jameson, true to form, praises this marvelous creation of Shakespeare's mind. She says:

> Of all Shakespeare's female characters, Miranda and Cleopatra appear to me the most wonderful. The first, unequalled as a poetical conception; the latter, miraculous as a work of art.[3]

Later Mrs. Jameson calls Cleopatra a "brilliant antithesis, a compound of contradictions, of all we most hate, with what we most admire."[4]

William Hazlitt was another early Victorian who had a mixed opinion of Cleopatra. While finding her "voluptuous, ostentatious, boastful of her charms, haughty, tyrannical, and fickle,"[5] Hazlitt must admit that for all her "great and unpardonable faults, the grandeur of her death almost redeems them....She keeps her queen-like state in the last disgrace, and her sense of the pleasurable in the last moments of her life. She tastes a luxury in death."[6]

A writer of 1849 had not this begrudging admiration of the Serpent of old Nile but instead gave this blistering attack on Cleopatra:

> Shakspeare makes Cleopatra as mean and little in her jealousy as an Abigail. There is nothing majestic or queen-like in her; and she fluctuates

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3. Ibid, p. 120.

4. Ibid.

5. William Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 74.

6. Ibid, p. 76.

> between the termagant and the simpering, silly gentlewoman, in a manner highly ridiculous.[7]

Like the two previous writers, he finds Cleopatra on a lower plane in the opening scenes and elevated in the later ones.

Heinrich Heine, the German poet, in his collected works published in 1856, added to this seemingly contradictory criticism thus:

> This creature is at once too good and too bad for this world. Most charming attractions are here the cause of most repulsive frailties..... (She is) a capricious, pleasure-seeking, ever-veering, feverishly coquettish woman.[8]

Further substantiating the dual method of criticizing Cleopatra, Charles Bathhurst calls her queenlike in her "boldness, pride, and command,"[9] yet is convinced nevertheless that, "Her passions are that of a mere ordinary woman, who has no respect for herself."[10] His condescending attitude is further shown by his statement that

> Shakespeare has put some very fine things here and there in her speeches, has made her interesting throughout, and winds her up at the last, partly by showing the attachment of her attendants to her, most magnificently.[11]

Most of the Victorians feel somewhat guilty in their admiration of Cleopatra. An anonymous writer in 1871 says

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7. _____, "Shakspeare's Character of Cleopatra," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. XI, Sept., 1849, p. 289.

8. Heinrich Heine, Sammtliche Werke, p. 288.

9. Charles Bathhurst, Differences of Shakespeare's Versification, p. 131.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

that "she must have been a lovable wretch after all--apart from the passion which she inspired in men,"[12] and that,"In spite of her badness, there is a wonderful fascination about her character, which overcomes alike our reason and our morality, and will not suffer us to be angry with her."[13]

Henry Hudson is another among the critics who find that Cleopatra is wonderful, yet has faults. Showing his admiration of her, he declared that she remains a queen to the end. His words are as follows:

> Cleopatra is, I think, Shakespeare's masterpiece in female characterization. There is literally no measuring the art involved in the delineation. As Campbell the poet remarks, 'he paints her as if the gypsy herself had cast her spell over him, and given her own witchcraft to his pencil.[14]

Succumbing to her charms as have many other critics, Mr. Hudson admits,

> There is, in short, an essential magic about her that turns the very spots and stains of her being into enchantment.[15]

The latter lines show his recognition of her faults, yet he succeeds in overlooking them better than most critics so far.

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12. "On the Character of Cleopatra," The Cornhill Magazine 24:359.

13. Ibid, p. 346.

14. Henry Hudson, Shakespeare: His Life, Art, and Characters, p. 407.

15. Ibid.

Dowden also gives his superlatives to Cleopatra; he calls her "more wonderful than any other of Shakespere's heroines,"[16] "an Eastern star, with none other like it, and ruling the destinies of the lords of the earth."[17] Nevertheless, with the long line of critics behind him, he is aware of the "gross, the mean, the disorderly womanhood in Cleopatra."[18]

F. S. Boas, writing in 1896, echoes these words. She has "paradoxical grandeur compounded out of all that is most morally worthless."[19]

One completely vitriolic comment comes from the Catholic World. There is no mixing of feelings here. Apparently the anonymous writer had begun to feel the effects of woman suffrage and used Shakespeare's Cleopatra to illustrate his opposition. He wryly remarks:

> Queen Margaret, Lady Macbeth, and the Serpent of the Old Nile are the embodiment of strength of character, of queenly rule. In fact, they ruled everything but themselves.[20]

Following is the concluding anathema:

> Cleopatra, considering her intellectual acquirements, is, from a Christian view-point,

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16. E. Dowden, Shakspere; His Mind and Art, p. 312.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. F. S. Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, p. 475.

20. "Shakespere and the New Woman," Catholic World, 64: 162.

> the most ignoble among Shakespere's queens....We find her a perfect adventuress, a voluptuary.... It is with unceasing regret we review her utterly useless though brilliant career. Her great power destroyed the one essential to usefulness: virtue, the precious diadem of the soul.[21]

It is surprising that the Victorian critics wrote their comments on Cleopatra as they personally saw her and not completely as the age would seem to dictate. Although there is a tendency to give opinions according to what we are led to believe are Victorian standards, the majority of the critics are original, sincere, and unafraid to express their own ideas. After studying the Victorian age, one would believe that all comments to be found on a character like Cleopatra would be similar in nature to the article, "Shakespere and the New Woman," that is, completely against Cleopatra. However, this is not the case. It has already been noted that the writers seem somewhat on the defensive for their admiration of Cleopatra, but the important revelation is that they do find her great, even though each critic makes certain that he has noted her moral failings.

Frank Harris, the harbinger of the reaction to the Victorian, was completely charmed by Cleopatra. He calls her "the greatest woman-portrait ever painted."[22] Waxing as eloquent as Mrs. Jameson, Harris continues,

> Her passionate love is displayed while her wantonness is almost left out of sight; on the

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21. Ibid, p. 216.

22. Frank Harris, op. cit., p. 196.

> other hand, her high courage and contempt of death are as an aureole to her - a most astonishing, veracious, gaudy portrait I call it, the finest beyond compare in all literature, worthy to stand with Hamlet and with Falstaff forever.[23]

Grace D. Vanamee is also typical of the period of great praise for Cleopatra. Disagreeing with earlier writers, she sees "nothing of the vulgar enchantress about her... She is at all times interesting and feminine to her fingertips... More than once she has uttered great thoughts and used noble language."[24]

Another instance of her disagreement with earlier critics is the following statement:

> Critics have said that Shakespeare's Cleopatra is not history; but who that has lived in the play will not agree with Furness, who said, in writing to Monsieur Jusserand, 'Who cares for history? If you had lived with Cleopatra for two years, as I have, you would adore her as much as I do.'[25]

Agnes Mackenzie turns the tide toward our more recent criticism. Her opinion would, at first glance, seem to be the same as the nineteenth century one. Upon examining it more closely, we find that the note of apology for admiring Cleopatra is not present.

> For all her littleness she is great, by the sheer life in her. It is that that

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23. Ibid, p. 216.

24. Grace D. Vanamee, "Antony and Cleopatra," Art World, Feb., 1917, p. 335.

25. Ibid, p. 331.

> constitutes her charm - a charm so strong it is a kind of genius.[26]

Nor when Miss Mackenzie sees the faults of Cleopatra does she comment in a perfunctory or vitriolic way. The following quotation illustrates the point:

> She has neither beauty, nor the skill of the hetaira She does not strike one as being particularly intelligent. Her wit is in crude practical jokes; her morals are nil; she has not even a personal fastidiousness. She is most of the things I least admire in my own sex, or out of it, and very few of those that either I or Shakespeare love in them... but I know that if I had been one of her women I should have passionately envied Charmian that last defiance, as she sets the crown straight, fronting the defeated soldiers. And I can understand how Iras should die of a sheer heart-break.[27]

A. C. Bradley, another twentieth century critic, disagrees with one of the epitaphs applied to Cleopatra, "a courtesan of genius." He explains, "So brief a description must needs be incomplete. Cleopatra, for example, never forgets, and if we read aright, we never forget, that she is a great queen."[28] Speaking of the objectionable parts of the play itself, Mr. Bradley says, "Though unfit for children, it cannot be called indecent; some slight omissions, and such a flattening of the heroines part as may confidently be expected, would leave it perfectly presentable."[29]

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26. Agnes Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 403.

27. Ibid, p. 402-403.

28. A. C. Bradley, "Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," p. 150.

29. Ibid, p. 141.

E. K. Chambers terms her "half a courtesan and half a grande amoureuse."[30] His judgement of her rests on her actions in the play, not on her psychological possibilities or her adaptability to his own time.[31]

Dorothy Johnson, a later critic, believed that

> There are no bad women in Shakespeare.... Cleopatra, if not the pattern of conventional morality, had the merit of being faithful to her man.[32]

Harley Granville-Barker has a tremendous admiration for Cleopatra and does not think one can judge her by calling her false. This would be a wrong standard.

> She is true enough to the self of the moment; and, in the end, tragically true to a self left sublimated by great loss. The passionate woman has a child's desires and a child's fears, an animal's wary distrust; balance of judgment none, one would say. But often, as at this moment, she shows the shrewd scepticism of a child.[33]

Mark Van Doren, like Harley Granville-Barker, admires Cleopatra greatly. He finds charm and strength in the Serpent of old Nile. In admitting that he does not understand Cleopatra, Mark Van Doren is probably describing in a different way what former critics have labeled her "fascination" or her "spell." The idea remains fundamentally the same.

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30. E. K. Chambers, op. cit., p. 253.

31. Ibid, Cf. pp. 249-257.

32. Dorothy Johnson, "The Perfect Wife," London Mercury, 11: 47 (Nov., 1924).

33. Harley Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 443.

Parrott describes Cleopatra's evil as

> all too human. Even in death her charm remains....There is no sense of tragic waste in the catastrophe of this tragedy, rather a feeling that the lovers have triumphed over external forces and that they rightly preferred death to life in a world of turmoil and treachery dominated by the cold-blooded Caesar Augustus.[34]

The last critic to describe Cleopatra is Wolcott Gibbs, who describes her as being

> Handsome, regal, witty, charming, cruel, jealous, and above all these, triumphantly and overwhelmingly wanton.[35]

In summarizing the main points in this discussion of Cleopatra, we note that the Victorian critics tend to reflect the standards of their age. Extremely bitter comments might be expected about Cleopatra, who violated every Victorian standard, but this is not the case. The critics, for the most part, praise her as another great heroine of Shakespeares; however, each critic makes certain that his readers know he does not approve of her moral conduct. After this type of criticism comes a period of exalting Cleopatra. This is short-lived, and the more modern critics appraise Cleopatra with less social pressure and more freedom. Different criteria are used for evaluating her worth. The conclusion reached by the modern writers is that they have great

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34. Thomas Parrott, op. cit., p. 318.

35. Wolcott Gibbs, "First Lady of the Nile, New Yorker 23: 62, December 6, 1947.

admiration of her, though they don't overpraise. Modern critics have very wisely judged Cleopatra on her own merits in the play, not on how she would fit into their own social pattern.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

The criticism of each period reflected the thinking of its age. With very few exceptions, Victorians tended to high praise for Rosalind, Juliet, Desdemona, Portia (Merchant of Venice), and Ophelia, even though the critics felt compelled to explain, excuse, or ignore completely such things as Rosalind's and Portia's masculine dress, Juliet's "Hymn to the Night," Ophelia's rude songs, or Desdemona's marrying a Moor. Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth were so opposite to Victorian standards that they could not receive any comment which did not note their moral failings. In the period of reaction following the Victorian period, just the opposite occurred. Cleopatra was given high praise; even Lady Macbeth had changed from a monster to the domestic wife - in the eyes of these critics. Most recent criticism neither praises highly nor criticizes extremely. The critics now base their opinions on the heroines' relationships to their plays, not the critics' age.

A difference in language is quite apparent. A comparison between the rapturous outpourings of Mrs. Jameson or Miss Faucit and the language of Mr. Harris would reveal this.

Another difference is the feeling of many of the Victorians that they were entrusted with the inner secrets of

the heroines. More emotionalism was displayed by the Victorians. The delusion of thinking oneself the confidant is more apparent in the comments on the tragic heroines.

The twentieth century criticism was influenced by Freud, whose teachings induced the psycho-analyzations of some Shakespearean heroines. This influence has almost spent itself, as recent articles indicate. This school of thought is not one of which the twentieth century may be proud; it has no place in scholarly criticism of literature.

As far as the investigator knows, the comparison of the criticism of Shakespeare's heroines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not received consideration by any other author. Studies have been made of specific heroines, but the comparison of one century's writings to another has not been treated. The contribution of this paper is the gathering of data on Shakespeare's heroines as found in the last century and a half.

The limitation of this paper is that not every piece of criticism written of Shakespeare's heroines in the last 150 years was examined. The important criticisms were read, but not all minor works could be evaluated in a paper of this scope. Though only seven heroines were discussed, all varieties were represented. These seven heroines called forth every possible degree of reaction. Only a slight deviation in the general conclusion would result from a study of all criticisms of all Shakespeare's heroines for the same period of time.

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